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KAMA SHILPA

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KAMA SHILPA

A Study of Indian Sculptures Depicting Love in Action.

11544

FRANCIS LEESON



'In the West Intellect is the source of life,
In the East Love is the basis of life.
Through Love Intellect gets acquainted with Reality,
And Intellect gives stability to the work of Love.
Arise and lay the foundations of a new world,
By wedding Intellect to Love.'

—IQBAL.

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F o r
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PREFACE

"What did they mean to the men who are long since dust?
Whose fingers traced,
In this arid waste,
These rioting, twisting figures of love and lust?
Strange, weird things that no man may say,
Things humanity hides away—
Secretly done—
Catch the light of the living day,
Smile in the sun.
Cruel things that many may not name,
Naked here, without fear of shame,
Laugh in the carven stone."

—LAURENCE HOPE

Even in these enlightened times some authorities on Indian art still find it prudent to draw an academic veil over much that is important in the subject. Of the few writers who have so far sought to interpret the erotic aspect of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist sculpture, none has so far succeeded in presenting his arguments with full clarity or conviction. There is a notable tendency to "humbug" on the subject, and to produce long texts loaded with fine writing and abstract irrelevancies, accompanied sometimes by a few third-hand and vaguely identified illustrations.

A common misconception is that the erotic element in Hinduism is unique among the great religions of pre-Christian origin. That this is not so is confirmed by the comparisons drawn in my second chapter. These attempt to put the Aryan and Hindu elements into correct perspective with the ancient civilised cults of the West, and so reduce correspondingly their more sensational aspects.

Each authority seems tempted to propound a favourite theory to the exclusion of others, and that theory seems inevitably to be coloured by the mental attitude of its protagonist. In a subject with such strong sexual implications it is not surprising that the writer's personal moral philosophy is sometimes reflected in his opinions. In this treatise I offer no original explanations but instead attempt systematically to present the most common hypotheses with supporting quotations. It is for the student to judge from

the text and the numerous accompanying photographs which interpretation is the most likely.

The plates have been selected by an eminent Indian scholar who has also written the legends to them. He has moreover read the text and made various useful suggestions, some in the light of recent excavations. I am grateful to him and to Mr. F. S. J. Richards for their co-operation.

F. B. L.

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I

ORIGINS AND COMPARISONS

The earliest extant piece of sculpture from the Indian sub-continent to which a possibly ithyphallic significance can be ascribed is the beautiful torso of a male dancer in action, only four inches high, and carved in greyish limestone, which is to be found in the Central Asian Antiquities Museum, New Delhi (Plate 2). Dating from the third millenium before Christ this fragment, together with another similar figure, was found at Harappa, in the Western Punjab.

There is nothing to compare with these sculptures in the perfection and sophistication of their modelling until we reach the classic period of Indian art nearly three thousand years later. They are even unique among other pieces found at Harappa and Mohenjodaro, and the limestone used for them is not to be found anywhere near the site of excavation. It is not surprising, therefore, that their association with the Harappa culture has been challenged.

Both figures have sockets for the attachment of head and arms, and, in the case of the one under study, for the genital organs. It is possible that originally there may have been more than one pair of arms, and following on this supposition, one authority has proposed

that this is a prototype for the later Hindu conception of Shiva as Lord of the Dance:

"Even in its present fragmentary state, the figure is imbued with a vital, dynamic quality and a suggestion of movement imparted by the violent axial dislocation of the head, thorax, and hips, exactly the same device employed to suggest the violence of Shiva's dance in the great Hindu bronzes of the Chola period."¹

Another link with Shiva from the Indus Valley civilization is provided by the famous bull seals and figurines of Mohenjodaro, which indicate a possible cult of the bull as a fertility and lunar symbol, somewhat akin to its role in ancient Egypt and Babylon. Is it mere coincidence that Shiva's vehicle should be Nandi the bull? The figurine of a bull from Mohenjodaro in the Central Asian Antiquities Museum, New Delhi, has sockets for horns, ears, tail and sexual organs.

The bull as a non-Hindu symbol appears again two thousand years later on an Asokan pillar. Iconographically, the exact meaning of the bull as a symbol in Buddhism is not clear, but it is significant that the capital from Rampurva, Calcutta, is one of a pair, the companion being surmounted by a lion, a creature sacred to Durga, one of the forms of Shiva's consort.

From bulls as early symbols of fertility one may turn to the female figurines found in enormous quantities in all the sites inhabited by the Indus people. These "mother-goddess" images are of a type easily paralleled in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, and have in common with present-day practice in the making of Sakti figures in the villages of north-eastern India the technique of pinching out the facial features in soft clay and adding breasts, eyes, nose, lips, head-dress and ornaments separately.

A further interesting link between these "madonnas" and the later sculptures of Hinduism is the appearance of a "harness" across the chest between the breasts on many of the Indus examples as well as on representations of the mother-goddess from Mesopotamia and Persia. This cross-harness is, in fact, referred to in the Atharva Vedas

¹ Dr. Benjamin Rowland: *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 15.

(ca. 1200 B.C.) as a long-life charm, and appears as the *channavira* in carvings of the Yakshis, the pre-Aryan nature spirits associated with fertility.

No artistic remains survive from the Vedic period (1500-800 B.C.), probably because only perishable materials such as wood and ivory were used during this time. However, these centuries are of importance for during them the basic Hindu attitudes to life and death were developed—ideas which later were to find permanent expression in stone and eventually bronze. What we do know of these times is pieced together from the Vedic hymns of the Aryan invaders of the sub-continent.

The Vedas were composed when the Aryans were confined to north-western India. When they advanced into the plains they came upon the pre-Aryan inhabitants, the darker skinned aboriginals of India, who are described in the Vedas as dwelling in walled cities, to be black in colour, noseless, and practising phallic worship and other unfamiliar rites. A. K. Coomaraswamy, that eminent authority, has pointed out that the main elements in Hinduism are of pre-Aryan origin, in particular the worship of Shiva Mahadeva, Shivalinga, and Kali, the Hindu mother-goddess. In addition, it was the pre-Aryan cult of devotion, or *bhakti*, that encouraged the worship of images rather than abstract principles, and thus the first sculptural representations of specific deities came to be made, either in anthropomorphic or symbolic form.

Chief among these deities, and one who was and is worshipped in both forms, was Shiva, who symbolized the powers of destruction which are the bases of re-creation. Shiva in his procreative aspect was and is worshipped in the form of the *lingam* (Plate 36) which is both a phallic emblem and, by symbolic inference, the tree and axis of the universe itself. For the benefit of the uninitiated, it should be mentioned that a phallus (from the Greek *φᾱλλός*) is a conventionalised representation of an erect male organ, or penis, and that its use in religion was and is not confined to India.



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Phallicism or Phallism is an anthropological term applied to that form of worship in which adoration is paid to the generative function of the male. Phallic emblems are found in many parts of the world, and there is a tendency to identify all obelisk-like stones and tree-trunks, together with rites like circumcision, as remains of phallic worship. The modern medical term "priapism" for a permanent and uncontrollable male erection comes from the name of the minor Greek god, Priapus, who was a god of fertility and the personification of the fruitfulness of nature.

Priapus was always represented as a man, usually grotesquely ugly, with an enormous and erect sexual organ. He was thought to be a son of Dionysus and Aphrodite, but as the phallus was a common luck-bringing object for the Greeks and Romans, he was worshipped by people in need of good fortune, such as hunters and fishermen, and also was frequently employed to ward off the evil eye.

Thus one can see that even beneath the apparently fine and restrained Nordic religion of the ancient Greeks, the land abounded with cults of a more ancient kind, having common origin with those of other parts of the world. For the sake of comparison, and to adjust the balance between East and West, it might be worth enlarging on these here. Pandit Nehru himself has written:

"Ancient India and ancient Greece were different from each other and yet they were akin, just as ancient India and ancient China had kinship in thought, in spite of great differences. . . . The Greeks chose Olympus as the abode of the gods, just as the Indians placed their gods and even their sages on the Himalayan heights. Both developed a mythology which was indivisibly mixed up with history, and it was not possible to separate fact from fiction. . . ." ²

The cults of most interest to us in our study of the erotic aspects of Indian religion are those of Demeter and Dionysus. Demeter, in Greek mythology, was a mother-goddess, and, like Kali, her Indian counterpart, she was known in Arcadia, at least, as "the black one". At one of her festivals a sacrifice of the first-fruits of the harvest was

² *The Discovery of India*, Meridian Books (1956), pp. 141 & 142.

offered by a priestess, men being prohibited from undertaking the duty. An initiatory ceremony of women by a woman also took place, and was characterised by obscene jests and the use of phallic emblems.

Closely associated with Demeter was Dionysus, god of fruitfulness and vegetation—and hence of wine. His worship was essentially orgiastic, and in his ritual the phallus was prominent. There was also the savage rite of *omophagia* (eating of raw flesh) in which a victim, perhaps originally human in some cases, was torn to pieces and sacramentally eaten raw. In the springtime *orgia*, when the Delphian Thyiads—a troupe of women and girls specially selected (Plate 12)—climbed Mount Parnassus to the sacred Corycian Cave, they milked goats in the flowered meadows nearby and flirted with male participants with tied-on satyr-tails who carried skins of wine. No doubt exists that at this season there was sexual freedom, and the sanctified state of *ecstasis* left the Dionysians free to follow the instincts of nature.

The worship of Dionysus flourished in Asia Minor, particularly in Phrygia and Lydia. His cult was closely associated with that of numerous Asiatic deities, such as Sabazius of Phrygia, and, from the time of Alexander the Great, Dionysus even appears in Greek mythology as conqueror of India:

“He . . . turned east and made for India. Coming to the Euphrates, he was opposed by the King of Damascus, whom he flayed alive, but built a bridge across the river with ivy and wine; after which a tiger, sent by his father Zeus, helped him across the River Tigris. He reached India, having met with much opposition by the way, and conquered the whole country, which he taught the art of viniculture, also giving it laws and founding great cities.”²

This might be taken for a fanciful history of Alexander's own drunken progress to the Indus in 327 B.C. but, according to Graves, it is earlier in date and merely records the eastward spread of the vine.

² Robert Graves: *The Greek Myths*, I. pp. 104 & 109.



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The Oriental Mysteries associated with Sabazius and Attis (Phrygia), Isis (Egypt) and Cybele (Asia Minor) which reached Greece and early Imperial Rome, were originally akin to the Mysteries of Demeter and Dionysus, containing, as has already been pointed out, many concepts in common with them. But their orgiastic ecstasies were more violent, and the psychical aberrations to which the devotees were prone through their passionate desire for divine communion were more dangerous. Emasculation was practised by the devotees of Attis, the high priest himself bearing the god's name. Communion with the deity was often attained by the simulation of a sacred marriage in which the initiate was corporeally united with the great god in a special bridal chamber.

In this rite there is more of a suggestion of the ritual wherein a Christian nun becomes the "Bride of Christ" at a church ceremony which she attends robed in white and at which she receives a "wedding" ring, than there is of any established rite in Hinduism.

The Great Mother of the Gods, or Cybele, as she was known in Greek and Latin literature, was sometimes identified with Demeter, the mother-goddess, but her worship was even more orgiastic in nature. Like Demeter, her sanctuaries were often on mountains and frequently in caves; like Durga, lions were her faithful companions. Her attendants, the Corybantes, were wild, half-demonic beings. Her priests, the Galli, were eunuchs attired in female garb, with long hair fragrant with ointment. Together with priestesses, they celebrated Cybele's rites with wild music and dancing until their frenzied excitement found its culmination in self-scourging, self-laceration, or exhaustion. As with Attis, self-emasculation sometimes accompanied this delirium of worship on the part of candidates for the priesthood.

The importance of Cybele in the history of religion is very great, for her cult, like the other mystic worships already described, at once formed a rival to Christianity and acted as a stepping-stone to it. Though their forms may appear strange and distorted, these cults have more in common with the subsequent religious phenomena of

Christendom, and, while they may have less in common with present-day Hindu practice, they may help us to understand better the significance attributed by some authorities to the erotic element in Indian sculpture.







II

THE EARLY CENTURIES

In the codes of later Hinduism, the Puranas, each god has assigned to him a Sakti, or female counterpart, who complements his power. Chief among these Saktis is Parvati, the consort of Shiva. Parvati is most widely worshipped in the form of Kali or Durga, in which roles she also plays the part of a mother-goddess. This "energy" partnership is paralleled in the case of Shivalinga by the *yoni*, which represents the female organ, or the creative force in its feminine aspect. The *lingam* often stands on its own, but the *yoni* is never seen symbolically without the *lingam*. When it appears, it is as the base for the *lingam*—the matrix, in fact. This *lingam-yoni* symbol is popularly known as the *kundi* (Plates 14 & 15), the union of the two representing the act of creation, that is to say, "genesis".

"But this twofold emblem would not take us to the very core of Indian thought if it did not also and above all express the resolving of the many into the one. By joining itself to the *yoni*, the *lingam*, the primordial axis, shows that the Absolute is deployed in multiple forms but is again resolved into oneness. Taken as one, the *lingam-yoni* expresses the antagonism of the male and female principles, and then in the triumph of singleness destroys that antagonism."¹

¹ Max-Pol Fouchet: *The Erotic Sculpture of India*, p. 9.

This metaphor of sexual union, or *mithuna*, is, of course, expressed in other, more obvious ways, as we shall see, but there is one variation which sometimes tends to be overlooked, and that is the embrace of the Yakshi and the Tree. The Yakshi, and her male equivalent, the Yaksha, was a class of supernatural being, originally associated only with fertility cults, but later assimilated into the orthodox religions of Hinduism and Buddhism.

In the Yakshi and the Tree, a motif seen frequently, for instance, in the railing of the Buddhist stupa at Bharhut (185-72 B.C.), is a symbolism that goes back to a period in Indian history when trees were regarded as objects of worship, and which is associated with old fertility festivals when youths and maidens gathered the flowers of the *sal* tree. Although the exact original meaning of the motif is not known, there are many Indian legends relating the power of women and Yakshis to bring trees into immediate flowering by embracing the trunk or touching it with their feet (Plate 9), which may be interpreted as symbolical of the soul's union with the divinity.

In the portrayal of the Yakshis at Bharhut there is an emphasis on the attributes of fertility in the swelling breast and ample pelvis. In the *Buddhacarita* (IV, 35) Asvaghosa describes such women who

"leaned, holding a mango bough in full flower, displaying their bosoms like golden jars."

Another attribute of fertility, already recognised in the prehistoric figurines, is also present in the Yakshis in the shape of the cross-harness or *channavira*.

India's earliest history is veiled in obscurity. It is assumed, however, that the earliest buildings were of wood and did not survive in the climate. Evidence for this belief is to be found in the nature of the architecture of the famous rock-cut Buddhist temples, which reproduces the wooden pillars and beamed roof of a timber structure. Thus, the history and development of Indian sculpture as a tradition does not become clear to us until the second century before Christ, when the first great stone-built Buddhist stupas were erected.



From the previous century, however, have survived at least the magnificent Asokan pillars and capitals, to which reference has already been made, and a few large human statues of rather uninspired aspect. In the second century, the great sculptural achievements were mainly Buddhist, and include the carved railings at Bharhut already referred to as well as the beautiful gateways at Sanchi. The latter may be dated in the first century before Christ, at least a hundred years later than Bharhut, and show a marked sculptural advance, the Yakshi figures in particular having aroused the admiration of connoisseurs. (Plate 16.)

One of these figures, carved in the round, is still in position as a spandrel on the North Gateway, and is a drastic and dramatically effective adaptation of the woman and tree motif:

"It would be hard to imagine anything more simple, yet more dramatically effective both from the iconographical and aesthetic points of view, than this presentation of the tree-spirit. Her legs thrust with the force of a buttress against the trunk of the tree, and from this magic touch its encircling boughs flower and receive the caressing grasp of the Yakshi, so that she seems a living vine, part of the tree that she quickens. . . . A sense of vitality is communicated by the tense twisting of the torso on its axis. In the frankness of their erotic statement the Sanchi Yakshis are a perfect illustration of the union of spiritual and sensual metaphor that runs like a thread through all religious art in India."²

At Sanchi can also be seen, though on the second stupa, what may possibly be one of the earliest examples of mild *mithuna*. In the upper panel of the outer jamb of the eastern gateway are represented in low relief a man and woman who may perhaps be identified as donors, or as an early and tentative instance of the *mithuna*, the female figure merely affectionately clasping the arm of the male figure. A curious detail that supports the latter hypothesis is that the figures in this panel are represented as standing on pedestals, a convention normally associated with cult images or statues when carved fully in the round.

As one enters the equivalent of the Christian era in India, the

² Professor Benjamin Rowland: *The Art and Architecture of India*, pp. 57 & 58.

use of the *mithuna* motif in temple sculpture becomes more common and increasingly more complex. It is an aspect of Indian religious art which baffles most Westerners; yet, as we have already established, sexual rites in western worship, disguised as "Mysteries", more often than not, were prevalent in ancient times, and continued, in a mainly negative aspect, into Christian times. Even the most casual research into the records of the Ecclesiastical Courts of medieval Europe will prove that such rites were by no means limited either to ancient Greek or Asiatic tradition.

The student seeking a single interpretation of the *mithuna* sculpture soon discovers that none exists. Each commentator is influenced by his education and upbringing. Those who justify the use of the images do so for widely differing reasons, and those who condemn them find they are not short of reasons for doing so. The practising Christian in particular finds it difficult to accept calmly these sculptures, because Christian theology contains the sexually negative tenets of 'immaculate conception', 'virgin birth', and in some instances celibacy of priests and nuns.

"An ocean of carnality within us is continually lashing against the shores of our spiritual natures, the soul; and these mighty waves of Carnality and Sensuality drown the voices of the Divine within us. The deliverance of the Soul from the error of the senses—the lust of the flesh—is Salvation."³

It would be appropriate here to reproduce some judgments based on western standards. One of the earliest we have dates from 1794, and says:

"We are totally unable, and equally unwilling to convey a full idea of these monstrous delineations; it must therefore suffice to say, that there is a great variety of not only human nudities in the most indecent, uncleanly situations, but men and beasts, and beasts and women, exposed in the most shameful combinations that a brutal imagination could suggest, in all the filthy attitudes of unnatural depravity."⁴

³ Sidney C. Tapp: *The Sexology of the Bible*.

⁴ Captain Edward Moor, F.R.S.: *A Narrative of the Operations of Captain Little's Detachment*.

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² Professor Benjamin Rowland: *The Art and Architecture of India*, pp. 57 & 58.

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³ Sidney C. Tapp: *The Sexology of the Bible*.

⁴ Captain Edward Moor, F.R.S.: *A Narrative of the Operations of Captain Little's Detachment*.





James Mill, in his *History of British India*, published in 1817, believed the sculptures encouraged the loosest morality:

"A religion which subjects to the eyes of its votaries the grossest images of sensual pleasure, and renders even the emblems of generation objects of worship, which ascribes to the supreme God an immense train of obscene acts; which has them engraved on the sacred cars, portrayed in the temples and presented to the people as objects of adoration, which pays worship to the *Yoni*, and the *Lingam*, cannot be regarded as favourable to chastity."

One of the earliest Christian missionaries expressed himself rather more violently:

"The Bible must supplant the narratives of their false divinities; their temples, covered now with sculptures and paintings which crimson the face of modesty even to glance at, must be demolished; the vile *lingam* must be levelled to the ground. . . ."

It is little wonder that Pandit Nehru has commented:

"To them (i.e. Englishmen), the Indian appears to be a special manifestation of original sin and all his works bear this mark." ²

When Europeans began to study more fully and less bigotedly the religious background to the controversial sculptures, their judgments became less severe, and again it is Pandit Nehru who sums up the situation:

"Indian art is so intimately associated with Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideals that governed the Indian mind. In art, as in music, there is a gulf which separates eastern from western conceptions." ³

² Ferdinand de Wilton Ward: *India and the Hindoos* (1850).

³ *The Discovery of India*, Meridian Books (1956), p. 205.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.



III

INTERPRETATIONS

At this point, with westerners beginning to think more logically about Indian temple sculpture, it may be appropriate to present the hypotheses, both European and Indian inspired, as to the origin and significance of its erotic aspects. Why, indeed, were these images of apparent human delight chosen to adorn the Houses of God?

Before discussing the various answers to this question in detail, it may be worthwhile to summarise them briefly as follows:

- (1) The *mithunas* are symbols of *sakti*—both sexes in one God—representing the "oneness" of God, or the magic syllable "AUM".
- (2) They are representations of supreme bliss—an attempt in earthly terms to convey the meaning of heavenly rapture.
- (3) The *mithunas* are temptations to lewd thoughts, put there expressly to be overcome by the devout.
- (4) They are just innocent depictions of a human activity in the same way as other sculptures show scenes of dancing, fighting, making music, praying, etc.
- (5) The *mithunas* were intended as a protection against the "evil eye", lightning, etc.
- (6) They attract grosser-minded people to "come to church", if only for the initial pleasure of examining them.





- (7) The *mithunas* are there for the sexual education of the young and ignorant, as a sort of illustrated Kama Sutra.
- (8) They are straightforward representations of ritualistic orgies or Yogic postures.

(1) ONENESS

Dealing with these propositions one by one, and starting with the hypothesis of "Oneness in God", we find the support of scripture:

"The matrix of all forms born from all wombs is Nature Prakriti. I, the Father, giver of seed."

(Bhagavadgita, XIV, 4.)

"The *yoni* and the *linga* symbolise the creation of the world. Their union represents *Karma*."

(Vatula Shuddha Agma)

"The union of the sexes is equivalent to the mystic syllable AUM. When the two sexes come together, each fulfils the desire of the other."

(Chhand. Up. I, 1, 6.)

Among those Europeans who see in the *mithunas* the symbolic union of the individual and the world soul is Mr. E. B. Havell, a former principal of the Government School of Art and Keeper of the Calcutta Art Gallery, who writes:

"It would be wrong to infer that the obscenities which occasionally disfigure Hindu temples are necessarily indicative of moral depravity. In the matter of sexual relationship Indian civilization, in every stratum of society, holds up a standard of morality as high as Europe has ever done.

"The ideas connected with sex symbolism in Hindu art and ritual are generally misinterpreted by those who take them out of the environment of Indian social life. In the Upanishads sexual relationship is described as one of the means of apprehending the divine nature, and throughout Oriental literature it is constantly used metaphorically to express the true relationship between the human soul and God."¹

The conception of spiritual oneness has been elaborated by an

¹ *Ideals of Indian Art*, London, 1911.

Indian authority, A. K. Coomaraswamy, who writes:

"The Indian sex-symbolism assumes two main forms, the recognition of which will assist the student of art: first, the desire and union of individuals, sacramental in its likeness to the union of the individual soul with God—this is the love of the herd-girls for Krishna; and second, the creation of the world manifestation, *lila*, as the fruit of the union of male and female cosmic principles—*purusa* and *sakti*."²

An American, Professor Benjamin Rowland, contributes:

"Their embraces have been interpreted as typifying the idea of *moksha* or union with the divine, the achievement of that primordial unity broken at the time Purusa divided himself to create the world. Numerous quotations from the texts support such an interpretation. . . ."³

In the oneness hypothesis, the *mithuna* is often bracketed with the *lingam-yoni*:

"... the union of the two gives a direct representation of the creation of the world. Uncompromising in their grandeur, they symbolise Genesis itself. But this twofold emblem would not take us to the very core of Indian thought if it did not also and above all express the resolving of the many into the one. By joining itself to the *yoni*, the *lingam*, the primordial axis, shows that the Absolute is deployed in multiple forms but is again resolved into oneness. . . . Need we repeat that representations of amorous embraces signify the union of separate principles, and are to be regarded as symbolic of oneness with the Divine?"⁴

Finally, Mulk Raj Anand traces the origins of the conception of oneness in his *Kama Kala* when he refers to the philosophies embodied in the aphorisms of the sages whose thoughts later become collected into the Brahmanas and the Upanishads:

"The essence of these speculations was the inauguration of a supra-sensual kingdom of belief in the One Absolute God, Brahman, who splits himself through desire into the Many and into whom the Unit, or One God, all multiple elements wish to return. . . . The parallelism of human impulse to procreate offers a clue to this creation of the cosmos:

'He desired

I am One

Let me be many that creation may be.'"⁵

² *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*, London, 1913.

³ *Art and Architecture of India*, p. 162.

⁴ *The Erotic Sculpture of India*, Max Pol Fouchet, pp. 9 and 75.

⁵ *Kama Kala*, Geneva, (1958), p. 9.





(2) BLISS

"In the embrace of his beloved a man forgets the whole world—everything both within and without; in the very same way, he who embraces the Self knows neither within nor without."

(*Brihad Aranyaka Upanishad*)

Nothing can give us an adequate idea of Eternal Bliss, but the theory is that in Indian art the keenest of human pleasures is taken as its symbol. The act of love is chosen to represent that ultimate state where the individual and the Universal are no longer separate. It represents more directly the moment when the self (*atman*) becomes merged through Release with the supreme impersonal Spirit. In a word: copulation figures Bliss. Mulk Raj Anand again analyses this proposition more deeply:

"As against His Joy, the condition of human existence is merely a lack of Joy, a form of suffering, which will last as long as men and women do not struggle to emancipate themselves from birth and rebirth, through worship and dedication and merge with the Supreme God or Bliss. Our human happiness gives but a glimpse of the boundless Joy in store for us, insofar as we recognise our true self for the briefest moment. For this reason, the sacred act of procreation is to be valued, as it affords the intensest moments of Joy we can experience while we strive for the ultimate and complete absorption into the Deity.

"With that characteristic genius for elaborating the highest sanctions, the ancient Hindus, therefore, accepted an anthropomorphic view of God, in which not only is human sexual pleasure exalted as the Joy nearest to God in realisation, but everything in life becomes divine, every action becomes, when properly understood, the concrete expression of some universal law, the shimmering surface of the deeper connection, the image of a less or more intimate approach to the Supreme Bliss, the starting point for the attempt to pierce the dreamy veil to the shadows which are more consecrated, and beyond whose dazzle of muslin lies the superabundant Joy. . . ."

And so on.

* *Kama Kala*, p. 18.

(3) TEMPTATION

The hypothesis of temptation is closely related to the theory of "cleansing", both being based on the fact that the *mithunas* are generally only to be found on the outsides of temples. In his famous *Bengal Lancer*, Francis Yeats Brown puts the theory of cleansing into the mouth of the Temple Superintendent at Puri, who says:

"The approach to the shrine of Jaganath is by avenues corresponding to man's life in the exterior and interior worlds. First there are the snares of the senses, portrayed by paintings and sculptures which your missionaries described as of 'appalling indecency'. Is Freud indecent? Can truth be indecent? . . . If the worshipper be blinded by his carnal appetites in these outer courts, he must return and compose his mind, for he is not worthy of the god."[†]

Other writers have explained that the worshipper should be able to give free vent to his imagination outside the shrine and cast away all lascivious thoughts before entering it. P. Thomas comments:

"This is a modern interpretation inspired by the western notion of the indecency of sex, and it is doubtful if this was the real intention of the builders of the temple."[‡]

Alain Daniélou considers the erotic sculptures to be the touchstones by which the man of renunciation can test whether his will to chastity is genuine, and he quotes a commentary on the Kama Sutra itself in support:

"The seekers of Liberation achieve their aim through the detachment which can only come after attachment. For the minds of beings are by their nature inclined towards the objects of the senses."

Finally, Fouchet quotes the instance of Tibetan Buddhists with a Tantric bias who apply certain tests in the course of initiation to discover whether the novice is virtuous:

"The lama-to-be is asked to look at paintings of a suggestive nature. If his serenity of mind remains undisturbed he is entitled to feel that he

[†] *Bengal Lancer*, London (1930).

[‡] *Kama Kalpa*, Bombay (1939), p. 139.



is on the true path. Sometimes the test is more realistic: the devotee is shut in a room to see women perform lewd dances, or couples miming lechery. Meanwhile a monk observes the patient. If he shows no flutter of desire, he is considered worthy to approach the truth and profess it."⁹

(4) INNOCENCE

While considering the motives behind the *mithunas* one should not overlook the possibility that there were no motives at all. This idea has occurred to others, notably to Pandit Nehru, who writes:

"In India we find during every period when her civilization bloomed an intense joy in life and nature, a pleasure in the act of living, the development of art and music, and literature and song and dancing and painting and the theatre, and even a highly sophisticated inquiry into sex relations."¹⁰

And Coomaraswamy writes:

"Popular explanations of such figures are scarcely less absurd than the strictures of those who condemn them from the standpoint of modern conventional propriety. They appear in Indian temple sculpture, now rarely, now frequently, simply because voluptuous ecstasy has also its due place in life; and those who interpreted life were artists. To them such figures appeared appropriate equally for the happiness they represented and for their deeper symbolism."¹¹

(5) PROTECTION

Among some of the more naive theories advanced to account for the presence of the *mithunas* is one that they were meant to resist the evil effect of the jealous gaze of observers, to ward off evil spirits that might have desired to possess the building, and to protect the structure against lightning, cyclones, or other such visitations of nature.

⁹ *The Erotic Sculpture of India*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁰ *The Discovery of India*, p. 71.

¹¹ *Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon*.





On this subject, an American, Wilber Theodore Elmore, has written:

"The Dravidian idea of the evil eye is that there are innumerable evil spirits waiting at all times to do harm. These spirits appear to be very much dependent on human suggestion and initiative. If special attention is directed to any object or person, and especially if something complimentary is said about it, some listening spirit will take notice, and thinking the object is desirable for itself, or out of jealousy and evil-mindedness, will bring about some evil. . . .

"With the idea of making the spirits think an article is worthless some flaw is left in everything. No house is ever completed. The weaver leaves a flaw in his cloth. . . . The placing of obscene figures and carvings on idol cars and temples is often explained in the same way."¹²

In the same year Mr. E. B. Havell confirmed this quaint piece of folklore:

"A Vishnu temple was a symbol of the active or dynamic principle of nature, and most of the external sculpture was popular art interpreting vulgar notions of the philosophic concept, but not necessarily implying any moral depravity. The indecency was generally introduced on account of the popular belief that it was a protection against the evil eye. There was never any obscenity in the sculpture of the sacred images worshipped within the sanctum and elsewhere."¹³

But a modern French authority is sceptical of this idea:

"Popular tradition in Orissa makes another such attempt to justify the existence of erotic friezes on the temples of Konarak. They are said to protect the buildings from storms and scare lightning away. Far from attracting, they repel. A very simple and pious explanation! But it entirely ignores the look of contentment on the faces of the 'sinners'. We must face the fact that the attitude of the artist in these representations of eternal bliss is *indulgent*."¹⁴

¹² *Dravidian Gods in Modern Hinduism*, 1915.

¹³ *The Ancient and Medieval Architecture of India*, 1915.

¹⁴ Max-Pol Fouchet: *The Erotic Sculpture of India*, p. 11.

(6) ATTRACTION

Another simple explanation for the *mithunas*, though the converse of the above, is that they were there because they were particularly amusing to the people and attracted them to the temples. Alain Daniélou gives this theory serious consideration and describes how, according to their stage of development, there are three main ways of attracting people's attention towards a sanctuary:

"The first approach suited for men of developed intellect is through abstract interest in a symbol; the second, meant for those more interested in forms than in philosophy, is through appreciation of artistic merit; the third for those more deeply immersed in worldly interests, and the only remaining way to attract them, is purely sensuous. The spiritual man is in no way affected by erotic pictures or descriptions . . . but the common man fears pain and is attracted by suggestions of sensuous pleasure. To discover images of this kind in a temple he has to wander into its dark corners and examine it from plinth to architrave. He will walk round the pillars, round the inner shrine. But in doing so, smelling the flowers and the incense, seeing the sacred lights, hearing the bells of worship, he will come under the influence of the sacred place. . . ." ¹³

(7) EDUCATION

The idea that the *mithunas* were a form of sexual education—a sort of sculptural Kama Sutra—is a popular one and has many supporters. Lawrence E. Gichner, describing how the temple was used both as a place of worship and a centre of social contact, says:

"Here the latest news was exchanged and discussed, and they could and did see and examine the numerous sculptures which were their books, source of knowledge and model for their own behaviour. . . . The lesson which these sculptures taught the Hindu was toward the enjoyment of the senses, rather than the denial of them. Hindu thought has always insisted upon the importance of sex and its physical manifestations. Thus, the temple decorations contain many carvings which demonstrate the various positions of the marital embrace." ¹⁴

¹³ *Marg Magazine*, Bombay (1948), p. 89.

¹⁴ *Erotic Aspects of Hindu Sculpture*, U.S.A. (1949), p. 13.





Alain Daniélou is more precise in his reference to this explanation for the *mithunas*:

"Sexual curiosity is one of the chief causes of perversion of the mind. If spiritual progress is to be made 'complexes' must be resolved and the mind made healthy. Sexual education through images, of every possible form of sexual enjoyment, is a useful means of mental clarification. It is a duty of the teacher to see that no latent longing remains in the mind of his pupil that may later prove a hindrance to spiritual progress or even cause a dangerous fall."¹⁷

This is confirmed by Mulk Raj Anand, who adds:

"The hypothesis seems to be that since sexual curiosity is, apart from the awakening of sensibility towards Reality, also one of the main causes of the perversion of the mind, it must be satisfactorily explained and analysed, so that education can lead not only to healthy enjoyment of the variegated pleasures of the body but also clarify the mind of all filth attached to the secret act."¹⁸

(8) YOGA AND TANTRA

It is widely suggested by some authorities that the eighty-four postures of *yoga*, which help to change the subtle centres of the body and so attain harmony, find their equivalent in the *mithunas*, on the erotic plane. Dr. Benjamin Rowland says that the practice of sexual intercourse with a "*sakti*" is permitted certain classes of adepts in *yoga*. Mr. Georges Guette adds that one would have to become a *yogi* before attempting some of the contortions figured in stone.

The erotic postures of *yoga* are sometimes described as "Tantric Yoga" and this description leads logically to the final major explanation for the *mithunas*, that is to say, that they are of Tantra, or Kaula, significance. Tantra is a word popularly used to describe those sacred scriptures which lay down rules for the worship of *Sakti*, the female aspect of the godhead, through *Panchatattva*. The burden of the Tantras is to make worship attractive to men:

¹⁷ *Marg Magazine*, Bombay (1948), p. 89.

¹⁸ *Kama Kala*, p. 26.

"Where there is worldly enjoyment there is no liberation; where there is liberation there is no worldly enjoyment. But in the case of the excellent devotees of Sri Sundari both liberation and enjoyment are in the hollow of their hands."

The rules of *Panchatatva* are commonly known as "The Five Ms", and these are *Madya* (liquor), *Mansa* (meat), *Matsya* (fish), *Mudra* (corn), and *Mithuna* (coition). P. Thomas has described the most important and significant ritual of the *Panchatatva* in detail in his *Kama Kalpa* :

"The rite is usually performed at night in the house of a wealthy *Sakta* where secrecy can be ensured, or in the inner shrine of some temple inaccessible to the public. The room where the rite takes place is cleaned and consecrated for the worship, and a circle of prescribed radius is drawn. At the centre of the circle is drawn a *Yantra* (mystic diagram) in which sits the host and his *Sakti*. Around them sit the guests, each beside his (own) *Sakti*.

"The *Saktis*, represented of course by living women, are said to be of three kinds: *Sviya*, or one's own wife, *Parakiya* or another man's wife, and *Saddharani* or common woman. Some texts ordain that *mithuna* is permissible only with the *Sviya*, while others hold that there is no harm in *mithuna* with any woman, as every woman is in effect the living embodiment of *Sakti*."

After describing the opening phases of the ritual, Mr. Thomas goes on:

"Drinking may now start. With the first cup the devotees eat meat, with the second fish, with the third gram, with the fourth all these and with the fifth anything he desires. The Mahanirvana Tantra ordains that no more than five cups of wine must be drunk during the worship after which sexual union must take place. . . .

"One of the objects of Tantric rites is said to be the raising of the devotee above all sense of right and wrong, an ideal often emphasized in Hindu mysticism; and we know for certain that the Tantric rites of Mahayana Buddhists were attended by much debauchery and exhortation to actions which Society considers evil or sinful."¹²

Mulk Raj Anand is less condemnatory in tone when he describes the Tantric (or Kaula) ritual, and ends somewhat cynically:

¹² *Kama Kalpa*, pp. 122-123.





"The so called vulgarity which later Hindus have come to see in the eroticism implicit in the Kaula cult is probably derived from the western Christian approach which considers the very central Hindu doctrine of the procreation of the Universe through the union of male and female as sin."²⁰

Anand describes another, more secret cult, less rational and more instinctive than Kaula, which flourished about the same time. These were the Kapalikas, who associated human sacrifice with their ritual and laid greater emphasis on the erotic impulse. They located the soul in the *yoni* and believed in *Moksha* through the complete enjoyment of woman. (Plate 44.)

* * * *

These then are the eight hypotheses of the *mithuna*. None of the protagonists quoted can be said to have proved his pet theory or theories, and the sculptures themselves give no definite clues. Which conjectures come nearest the truth? Perhaps the reader will be able to form an opinion for himself when he has read the next chapter and compared text and illustrations.



²⁰ *Kama Kala*, p. 33.



IV

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD AND LATER CENTURIES

After Sanchi the erotic motif as such is not found persistently for another thousand years. During this period, which included the Golden Age of Indian sculpture—the Gupta period—the extreme *mithuna* was a rarity, though voluptuous *Saktis* and *Apsarases* (celestial dancers) were commonplace. The lingering predominance of Buddhism may have had some influence in effecting this restraint, but gradually the Shaivite cult of Hinduism gained the ascendant, and the image of Shivalinga began to appear more frequently.

One of the few surviving gems of Hindu architecture of the Gupta period is the Temple of Vishnu at Deogarh. This fragmentary building, probably dating from the fifth century after Christ, is one of the most ornate and beautifully composed examples of Gupta art. Within the framework of the main doorway are enclosed narrow vertical bands of decoration with representations of amorous couples. (Plate 42). Thus the non-sectarian provenance of erotic sculpture was established early on, in the same way as Indian art in general. The early convention, initiated by Fergusson, of classifying Indian art and



architecture by religion has often proved misleading. Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus of every sect alike have drawn upon, and in turn contributed to, a tradition of art common to India as a whole.

However, as has been said, Shaivism predominated towards the end of, and after, the Gupta period. The seventh century cave temple on Elephanta Island, near Bombay, is well known for its *lingam* shrine. Shiva also appears at Elephanta in his androgynous, or half-female, form, Ardhanari. At Ellora (8th Century) Shiva appears as Bhairava, a fearsome aspect, dancing the wild *tandava* (Plate 33). He also appears with his consort in a scene popularly known as "Shiva's Marriage". With one of his four hands he holds one of Uma's, and with another his own *kamarband* (Plate 34). This representation of Shiva's wedding, like that at Elephanta, has been described as

"A timeless scene of bliss wherein the fire of life, the energy of the creator, is quick with the ardour of its eternal source and at the same time throbbing with the pulse of time."¹

Above the happy couple hover airborne *devas*, come to praise the climax of the god's union with his Himalayan bride, a wedding that

"typifies the world and all its myriads proceeding from the reunion of the One who was never divided."²

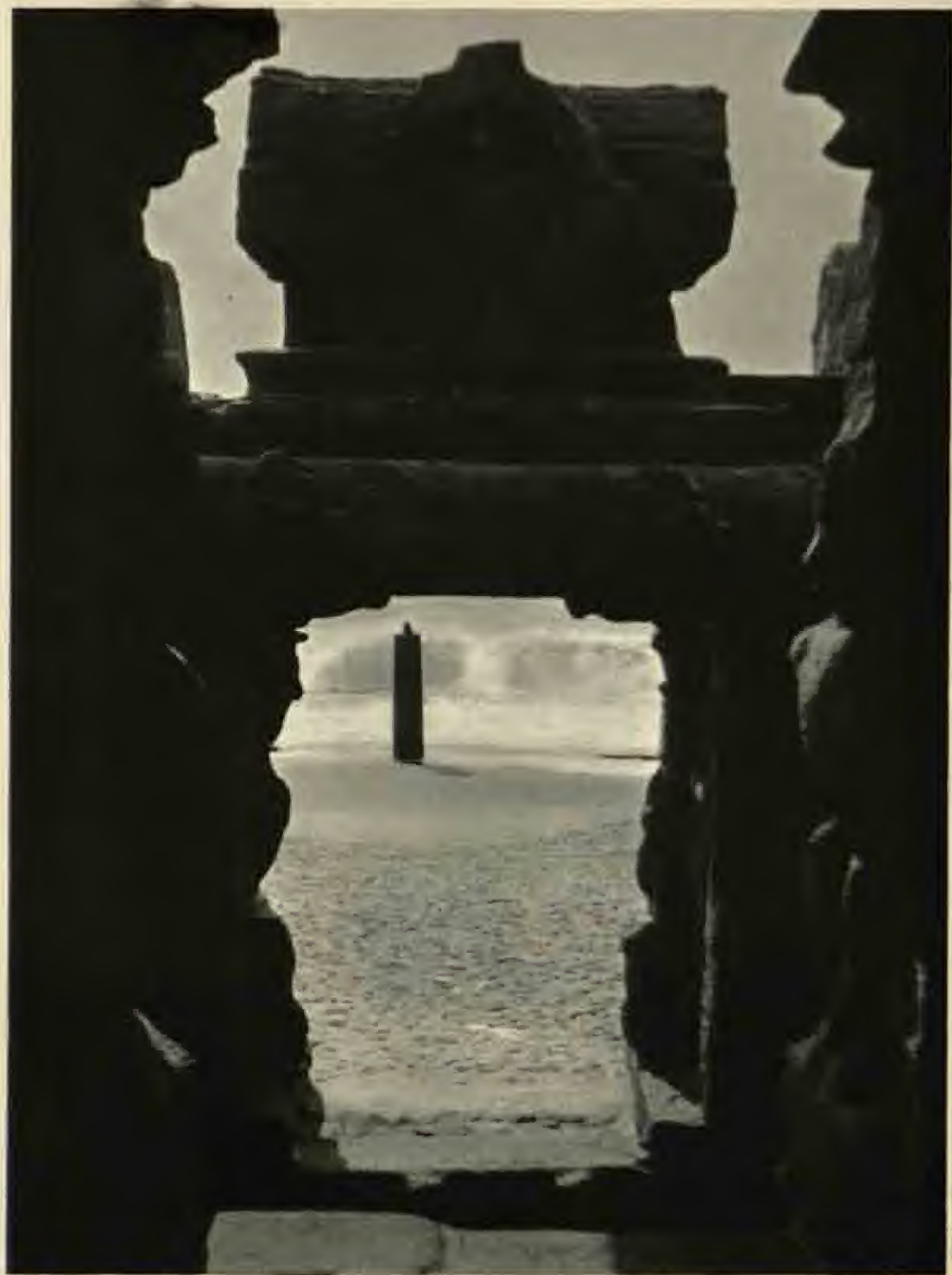
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At Mamallapuram, on the Coromandel Coast, the waves dash today against a sea-wall built to protect the Seven Pagodas from the rough swell of the Bay of Bengal. On the wall stands a square-cut phallic-tipped lamp-post (Plate 35), and in line with it, back in a small dark sanctuary facing out to the waves, is a shattered sixteen-sided black basalt *lingam*. Ptolemy the Greek mentioned Mamallapuram in the second century after Christ as a seaport, and Hiuen Tsang of China confirmed this in the seventh, when the Seven Pagodas were built and carved from the living rock by the Pallavas.

The dynasties that succeeded to the power of the Gupta Empire

¹ Zimmer: *Philosophies of India*, New York (1951), p. 199.

² Benjamin Rowland: *The Art and Architecture of India*, p. 178.



in central and northern India introduced a new style of architecture known as the *nagara* or Indo-Aryan, and one of the earliest examples of this style, the chief feature of which was the curvilinear spire (*sikhara*) over the shrine, is to be found at Bhubaneshwar in Orissa. The earliest temple, the Parashurameshwar, dates from A.D. 750, and the latest, the Lingaraja, from about A.D. 1000. During the intervening period both the architectural style and the quality of the statuary improved, developing from a naive simplicity to a sophisticated self-confidence.

The more advanced type of *mithuna* is much in evidence at Bhubaneshwar (Plates 44-51) and even more so at the twelfth century temple of Jagannatha, Lord of the Universe, at Puri (Plate 52) and to the famous Surya Temple at Konarak, dating from the thirteenth century (Plate 53). The Konarak Temple, known also as the "Black Pagoda", is perhaps the finest example of the Orissan style. Its composition and outline represent a classical feeling which underlies the whole tradition of art in Medieval India:

"Like a lighthouse echoing to the hammers of the sea, like a dark pyramid on a waste shore, or some caravan forgotten by wandering gods and turned to stone—such is Konarak, Temple of the Sun, fallen fragment maybe of that star, with a coating of erotic imagery; caressing, copulation, orgasm and desire."²

A unique feature of this temple is the twenty-four great stone wheels (Plate 54) on either side of the base, making the structure into a giant "juggernaut" car, or chariot of the sun. Round the base run two friezes of sculpture of a highly erotic nature, including animal as well as human couples (Plates 55-59). Professor Benjamin Rowland propounds a special theory that at Konarak the function of these endlessly repeated pairs in dalliance must have had something to do with actual orgiastic rites conducted in association with a cult of the sun as a universal fructifying force. He quotes a suggestion that an esoteric Magian phase of sun worship, perhaps originating in the famous temple at Multan, was followed at Konarak.

² Max-Pol Fouchet: *The Erotic Sculpture of India*, p. 51.

During the period of development of the Orissan temples great and terrible things were happening on the other side of India. In A.D. 986-988, Sabuktigin, the ruler of the little mountain kingdom of Ghazni, in what is now Afghanistan, invaded the Punjab and captured Peshawar. Using this foothold, his successor, Mahmud of Ghazni, made annual raids into India. The most famous of Mahmud's exploits was his raid, across trackless desert sands, on the great temple of Shiva at Somnathpur, or Somnatha-Patan, in the Kathiawar Peninsula, in A.D. 1025.

At that time, Somnath was one of the Sacred Cities of India, and the temple, with its tens of thousands of priests, was a town in itself, surrounded by a series of massive fortifications. Supported by 56 wooden pillars coated with silver, the innermost shrine sheltered a giant stone *lingam* encrusted with jewels, which was washed every day with water from the Ganges and garlanded with flowers from Kashmir. The Muslims fought their way to this sanctuary, sacking the temple and putting 50,000 *brahmins* to the sword. Mahmud refused the fabulous sums offered in ransom for the great *lingam* by the surviving priests, and ordered it to be smashed into fragments and carried back to Ghazni. There the pieces were buried under the threshold of the Great Mosque and are trampled on to this day by True Believers as they enter and leave the mosque.

The first invasions of north-western India made with any lasting effect were those of Mohammed of Ghor, who had himself overthrown the rulers of Ghazni. Like Mahmud, however, he had one eye on this world and one on the next. He too combined the breaking of idols with the collecting of diamonds totalling nearly half-a-ton in weight during the course of his nine raids.

In 1202 the army of Qutb-ud-din, the Viceroy of Mohammed of Ghor, penetrated to the Bundelkhand in north-central India, where it reduced and plundered the fort Kalangar and its temple, not far from Khajuraho, the capital of the Rajput Chandella kings, who had risen to power in the first half of the tenth century after Christ. Some of the temples at Khajuraho were built in the reign of King Dhanga





(ca. A.D. 950-1002). Prithviraj, the last great Hindu ruler of northern India, devastated and occupied the territories of the last of the Chandella Kings in A.D. 1182-83, and a few years later the Muslim hordes swept over the country, looting, plundering and destroying in the name of their religion.

Only twenty of the original eighty-five temples of Khajuraho are now standing. The way in which they fill a now desert area covering only a square mile seems to imply some special object, such as an organisation of religious orders not unlike that planned by the Oratorians in Italy in the sixteenth century. Mulk Raj Anand suggests that two of these cults were the Kaulas and Kapalikas (see pp. 49, 52), as there are references to them in the play "Prabodha Chandrodaya", which was itself performed in the presence of the Chandella King Kirtivarman in ca. 1051-1098.

Percy Brown, an acknowledged authority on Indian architecture, comments:

"As at Konarak, it is proved by the carvings on these temples that the same sinister ritual which degraded that monumental conception also prevailed at Khajuraho, and it is possible that the religious community concerned suffered the same fate. Such may be one of the explanations for the almost complete absence of life within the precincts of these beautiful buildings, and their disuse over such a long period of time." *

Whatever the ideals were, they stimulated the building art to a remarkable degree, as these temples, rising like small mountains of buff masonry above the dusty scrub, amply testify. Although the surviving shrines are dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu and the Jain saints, there is, as expected, no essential difference in their architectural character, although this is itself quite different from that in any other part of the country.

Each shrine stands on a high masonry terrace, without any enclosure wall. The vertical is emphasized throughout, from the high base, through the successive walls and roofs, to the ultimate range of lesser peaks that constitute the main spire. This stressed verticality,

* *Indian Architecture*, Vol. 1, p. 195.

according to Professor Benjamin Rowland, was intended to lead the gaze of the worshipper upward to the point of magic union with the divine and, in like manner, the sculptural decoration also led the way to that desired union. This decoration takes the form of two, and sometimes, three, parallel friezes, peopled with groups of half-lifesize statuary carved in high relief, representing a moving pageant and never-ending procession of life-like forms—650 on one temple alone—shapely in appearance, exquisite in workmanship and of inexhaustible interest.

The erotic carvings show a particular refinement when compared with those from other parts and periods. The figures are predominantly female, and they participate in tableaux of a complicated orgiastic nature. (See Plates 29, 62, 63, 64, 65.) All possible variations on the main theme of physical love are illustrated, with every stage demonstrated, from preliminary caresses, through passionate kissing, to acrobatic consummation. In one particularly arresting group a girl participant, apparently overcome with coyness, turns away and holds a hand to a shyly smiling mouth. (Plate 26.)

In contrast to the relatively refined artistic treatment of the tableaux on the temples proper, one side of the terrace of the Matangeswara and Lakshmana Temples bears a reduced-scale frieze in which the sculpture is naive and earthy. (Plate 65.) This band is nothing less than a film of carnal delights—a mirror of frenzied fornication, in which numerous couples participate at the same time. It is a matter for speculation as to just how these particular scenes fit into the established hypotheses for erotic sculpture.

In this connection, Professor Douglas Barrett, Deputy Keeper of Oriental Antiquities at the British Museum, in conversation with the author, compares Khajuraho with Konarak, pointing out that both the Kings of Orissa and the Chandella Kings of Bundelkhand were "*junglis*", that is to say, both dynasties were of barbarian origin. Only rulers who maintained large harems, as "*junglis*" did, could enjoy the company of so many lovely girls in their sexual orgies, and it is only in Bundelkhand and Orissa that one will normally see any-





thing more than *couples* in *mithuna*. His theory is that the tableaux illustrated the privileges of these kings for the visual pleasure of the commoner, the purpose being to convey to the ordinary man a conception of heavenly bliss—i.e. unlimited women for an unbridled lust. [See Chapter III(2).]

* * * *

Something similar to the frieze on the temple base at Khajuraho, both in size and plastic treatment, may be seen a thousand miles away in distance and some two hundred years in time, at Somnathpura in Mysore. There, in the Hoysala period temple of Prasanna Channa Kesava built in A.D. 1270, are a dozen little love scenes, each occupying a six-inch high recess in a frieze running round the outer base of the temple. (Plates 76 & 77.)

Elsewhere in south-central and southern India, the erotic motif is to be seen only sporadically in the temple decoration of the succeeding centuries. (See Plates 78, 79, 81, 82.) One of the most curious instances is at Kanchipuram, on a pillar of the Vedanta Desika shrine in the sixteenth century Varadaraja Perumal Temple (Plate 80). A trio of worshippers, manhoods erect, face a line of tiny *kundis* and appear to worship a naked goddess, probably Parvati, above them. She holds a parrot, the pet of Kama, god of Love. Further up the column a lady is being taken in an acrobatic pose by a fellow who is not to be deterred from blowing a trumpet at the same time.

After the Vijayanagar period (1370-1565), the *mithuna* almost disappears as a feature in Indian sculpture, and in any case is to be found, not on the base, walls, or pillars of the temples, but tucked away among the myriad figures on *gopuram* or *vimana*. Among the temples of the south, where, following the Muslim conquest of most of the rest of the country, Hindu temple architecture enjoyed its final classical phase under the Nyaks in the seventeenth century, mention may be made of the Temple of Tiruvatakudi, near Karikal, where, on the *gopuram*, one man may be seen enjoying, ingeniously and simultaneously, no

less than six women—recalling the Kama Sutra's "Congress of a Herd of Cows".

* * * *

With the decline of indigenous architecture which coincided with the spread of European influence in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, temple sculpture deteriorated in originality and style and the erotic motif itself gradually disappeared. Far to the north, however, and inaccessible until recent times to western ideas, lay Nepal, where temple art continued to flourish under the Newars, and later, even under the Gurkhas. In fact, in 1905, one traveller went so far as to say: "Nepal is still an authentic replica of an India that has disappeared."³

Nepal shared the common Buddhist origin of Indian temple art, and there is a direct link with Sanchi, across nearly two thousand years, in the Yakshi figures that support the sideways-projecting lintels of Nepalese temple doorways in the same way that they support the outer ends of the cross-bars of the Sanchi gateways (Plate 16).

The Newar inhabitants of Nepal, who probably originally came from the north, possessed an artistic sensibility of a particularly exuberant nature. The pagoda-like structure of their wood-and-brick shrines lent itself in general to elaborate treatment, and a particular feature of interest to us in our specialised study is the carved wooden struts which support the overhanging roofs. These usually consist of a many-armed godhead acting as a sort of diagonal caryatid and standing on a pedestal. This pedestal, or *predella*, is carved in deep relief and often brightly coloured and depicts what Perceval Landon describes as

"An allegorical scene, recognised as religious at once by the Nepalese, but often disconcerting in its realism to a visitor fresh from Europe."⁴

In other words, an erotic scene. (See Plates 83-94.) Percy Brown, an authority on both Indian and Nepalese architecture,

³ Sylvain Lévi: *Le Nepal*, Paris (1905-08).

⁴ *Nepal*, London (1928), Vol. I, p. 184.





attributes these scenes to the Tantric element in Nepalese Buddhism, and I have not seen this assignation denied anywhere. Some of the scenes, however, have a vulgar humour which seems to belie a spiritual intention. Take, for instance, the bracket on the Shiva Temple in Kathmandu (Plate 86) where a porter, with a child in his head-slung basket, has intercourse with a woman who still has a baby at her breast, or another motif, often repeated (Plate 84), where a girl is taken, apparently by surprise, from the rear as she works at a churn.

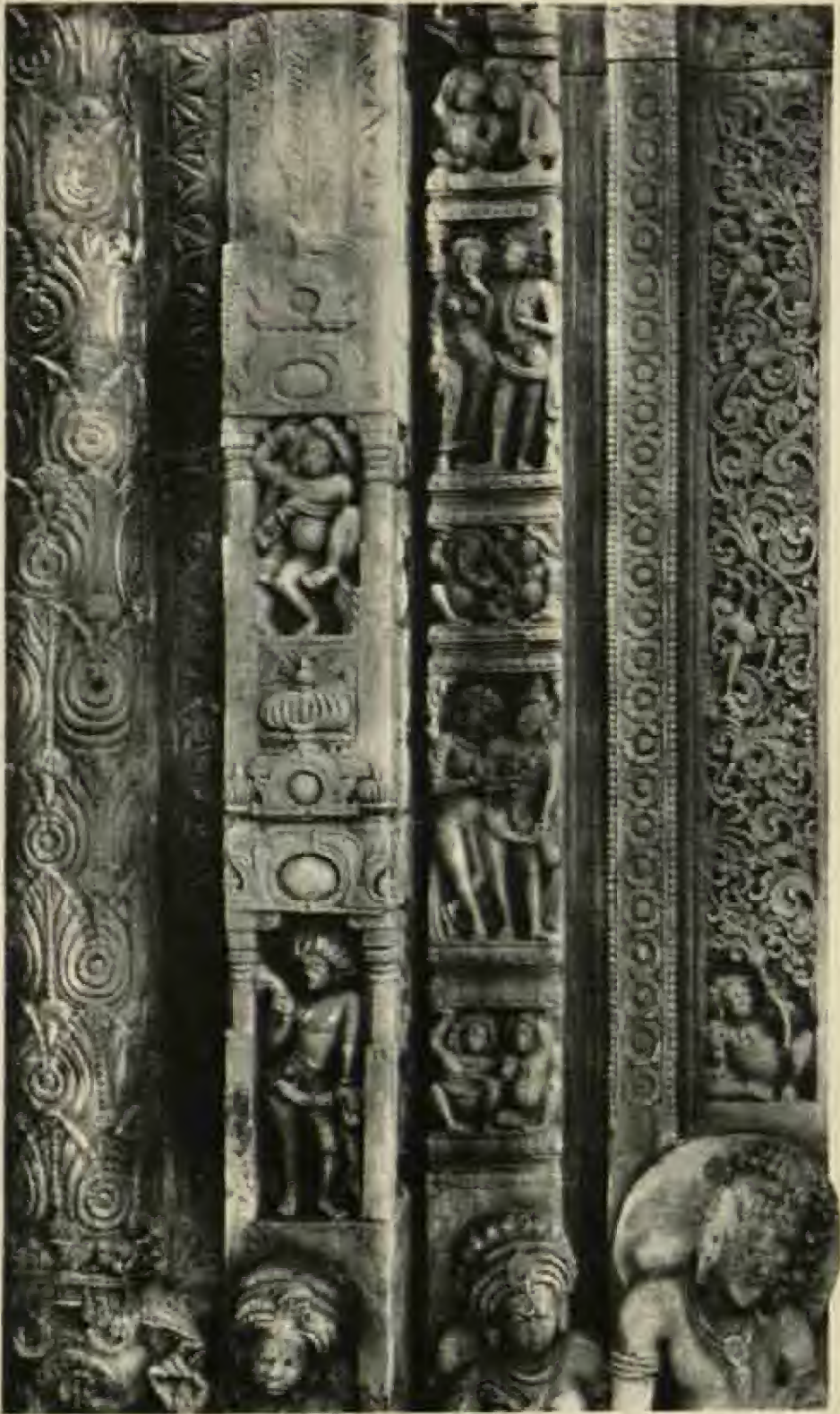
More solemnity is accorded to another erotic aspect of Nepalese (and Tibetan) Buddhism, and this is the striking conception of "AUM", or the Oneness of God [see Chapter III(1)] as visually represented by the "Adi-Buddha". This manifestation is composed of two figures clasped in *mithuna*. The twelve-armed, four-headed deity—the Yi-dam Samvara or Hevajra of Nepal, the Yi-dam Sang-nyi of Tibet—tramples on Time as his single-headed, normal-handed Sakti clings round his waist and embraces him passionately.

Buddhism and Hinduism are inextricably mixed in Nepal, and religion itself is closely interwoven with everyday life. Erotic motifs appear not only on temples but on secular buildings such as public shelters (Plate 95) and even military barracks (Plate 96), while sometimes, in remote parts, boundary-markers are adapted to serve as *lingams*. Finally, in jungle clearings the traveller may stumble on small groups of phallic-shaped stones placed significantly.

Thus is emphasized something of the philosophy of life in the Indian sub-continent: that religion and life and sexuality are one, and not three separate entities kept rigidly apart and secluded in privacy as they have been for centuries in the West:

"No couples are seen in the shrines of the Christian Occident. They only appear under the baleful signs of malediction and exorcism. The first couple are driven out of Eden; they are symbols of banishment and fear, and proclaim the chastisement of the flesh. But India's civilisation, being both spiritual and sensual, irradiates the union of man and woman with bliss."¹

¹ Max-Pol Fouchet: *The Erotic Sculpture of India*, p. 95.





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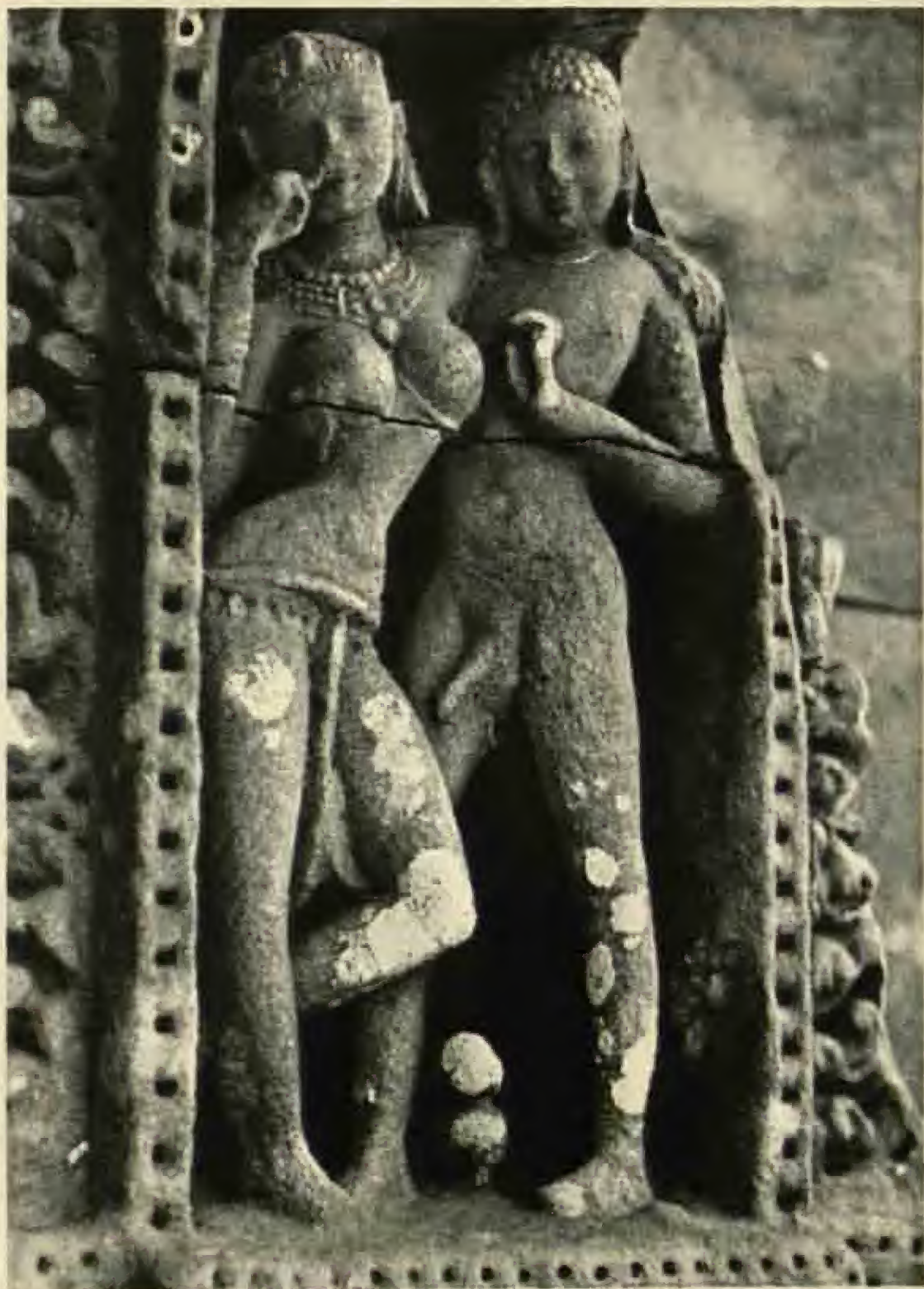
















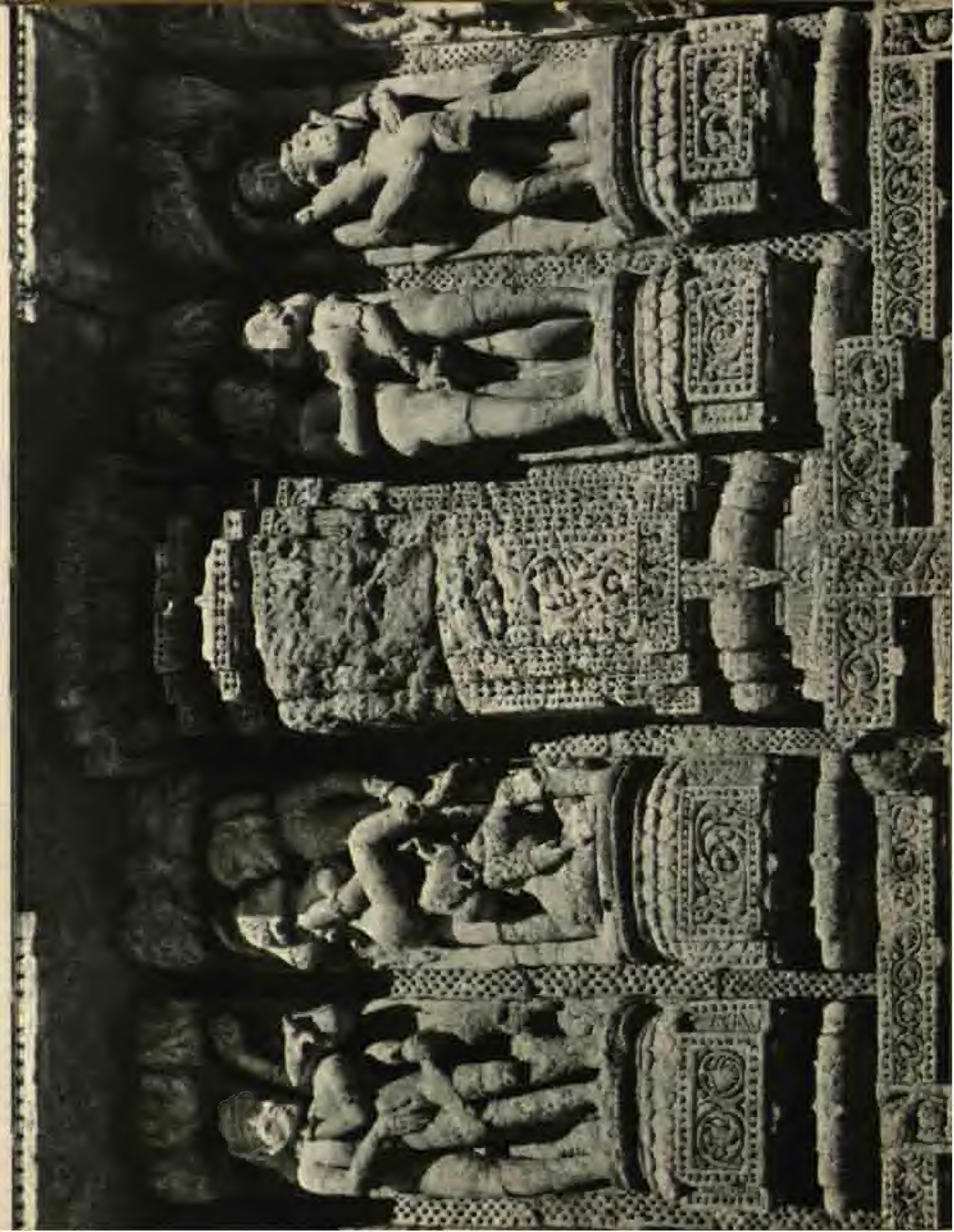






















65









69



69



70















(78)



(79)









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⑦



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NOTES TO PLATES

1. COURTESAN. (KHAJURAH). 11TH CENTURY.

The bejewelled Apsara wearing a flowing scarf and *sari* stands in a bewitching posture. She stretches her right arm behind her head and places her left hand suggestively on a breast.

2. MALE DANCER. (HARAPPA, WESTERN PAKISTAN). c. 2400-2000 B.C.

The head, arms, breast, nipples and the genitals (all now missing) of this grey limestone statuette were cut separately and socketed into the torso. Originally, perhaps, this figure was ithyphallic and bore some relationship to the Rudra-Shiva cult of the Indus Valley peoples.

3. BULL SEAL. (MOHENJODARO). c. 3RD MILLENIUM B.C.

Many steatite seals have been found on the sites of the Indus Valley Civilization, almost all with characters in a script not yet deciphered.

4. 5. FRONT AND BACK VIEWS OF MALE LIMESTONE TORSO. (HARAPPA). c. 3RD MILLENIUM B.C.

6. 7. FRONT AND BACK VIEWS, BRONZE DANCING DOLL. (MOHENJODARO). c. 3RD MILLENIUM B.C.

8. SUDARSANA YAKSHI. (BHARHUT). 2ND CENTURY B.C.

An ancient Indian fertility cult connected with Yakshas and Yakshis was very popular. It is significant, however, that as depicted in ancient art Yakshas and Yakshis, though closely connected with sex and eroticism, hardly give an impression of frank eroticism. Sudarsana or the 'Beautiful' Yakshi standing on the *Makara*, a fertility symbol, is very decorously dressed. Her left hand below her navel may, however, express her erotic nature.

9. YAKSHI CHULAKOKA. (BHARHUT). 2ND CENTURY B.C.

The heavily bejewelled Yakshi stands under an Asoka tree in full blossom. Her left arm and leg entwine the tree and with her right hand she holds one of the branches. The elephant below is her emblem.

10. YAKSHI CARRYING A BIRD-CAGE. RAILING PILLAR (MATHURA). KUSHANA, 2ND CENTURY.

The Yakshi standing on a dwarf is the prototype of a contemporary courtesan. She wears ornaments and a thin transparent *sari* held to the waist with an elaborate girdle, which reveals her sex. She holds a bird-cage in her right hand; the bird, which may well be a fighting-cock, is perched on her left shoulder. At the top, a courtesan grasping a mirror with an attendant holding a toilet-box is engaged in her toilet.

11. YAKSHI. (DIDARGANJ, PATNA). 2ND CENTURY B.C.

Her body is beautifully modelled, giving the feel of the flesh, and follows closely the ideal of female beauty enjoined in Sanskrit poetry. The ornaments are simple but effective and the folds of the *sari* and *uttariya* are neatly done. The *chauri* in her right hand may be her symbol.

12. VILLA OF THE MYSTERIES. (POMPEII, ITALY). 1ST CENTURY B.C.

This painting, one of 29 scenes in fresco, illustrates the initiation of young girls into the mysteries of the Dionysiac festival. The girl on the right whirls in a dionysiac dance, as the girl on the left is beaten symbolically with a stick by a priestess (Flagellation).

13. NAGRAJA WITH HIS WOMEN. (AJANTA, CAVE 19). 6TH CENTURY.

Within the lotus roundel is depicted a seat with footrests. The Nagraja is depicted in *lalitasana*, with his queen reclining on him and an attendant on either side.

14. SHIVALINGA. DARBAR SQUARE (BHATGAON, CENTRAL NEPAL). 17TH CENTURY.

This is the usual form of the *lingam* in both India and Nepal. The *Kundi* combines both the upright phallus and the *yonis* representing the female organ serving as the matrix. The square recessed base with the lotiform pedestal represents a *Yantra*, an important article in the *Sakta* cult. The *yonis*, or *Arghya*, takes the overflow of libations poured over the *lingam*.

15. LINGA-WORSHIP. KANDARIYA MAHADEVA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The *lingam* is in the centre with four devotees on either side, who may well be the *Pasupatas*. They are offering garlands, playing musical instruments and saluting the god.

16. YAKSHI BRACKET. (SANCHI, NOW IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM). 1ST CENTURY B.C.

The Yakshi, her transparent *sari* revealing her sex, stands with legs crossed under a mango tree symbolising love and spring.

17. MITHUNA. CHAITYA CAVE (KARLE, NEAR POONA). 1ST CENTURY B.C.

The couple have plump but lithesome figures. On the left stands a bejewelled girl with legs crossed. Her crooked right arm is taken back playfully while her left hand is on the shoulder of her partner who stands gracefully.

18. MITHUNA IN A DANCING POSE. CHAITYA CAVE (KARLE, NEAR POONA). 1ST CENTURY B.C.

The bejewelled female dancer wearing a thin transparent *sari* which reveals her sex is dancing with her legs flexed and her hands overhead in the attitude of adoration. The turbaned and bejewelled male has one hand on the breast of the female partner and the other on his waist. The careful modelling has caught well the rhythm of the dance.

19. CELESTIAL COUPLE. PILLAR MEDALLION. (BADAMI, CAVE IV). c. 7TH CENTURY.

The couple are in a close embrace. The woman touches the cheek of her beloved, who holds her by the wrist. A female attendant stands to the right.

20. VISHNU WITH HIS CONSORT LAKSHMI. PARSVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The ancient Vedic god Vishnu in course of time became associated with the goddess Sri Lakshmi, symbolising fertility, abundance, beauty and good fortune. According to Puranic conception, Vishnu and Lakshmi stand for the ideal human relationship of a man and his wife. The bejewelled figure of the four-handed Vishnu stands in a slightly flexed position embracing Lakshmi, who is looking lovingly towards her divine spouse.

21. SEXUAL CONGRESS. PARSVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The male partner seated on a chair has crooked his right leg to support his disrobed partner, who is astride him. She is clutching a lock of his hair with her right hand. The emotional intensity of the act is well marked on their faces.

22. AN AMOROUS COUPLE. DEVI JAGADAMBA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

This close-up view of the couple in love-making shows the vigorous movement of the female partner. Her left arm holds her partner's neck tightly and her right hand clutches a lock of his hair. Clutching the hair in sexual congress to enhance the emotional intensity of the act is enjoined in the Kama Sutra.

23. TENDER LOVE. DEVI JAGADAMBA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

This relief is quite different from the usual run of erotic sculptures at Khajuraho and shows a tender moment in the meeting of lovers. The male with rather a feigned smile is holding the arm of his beloved, who, apparently displeased by his vagaries, is, with a finger on her lips, begging him to cease the profession of his love. In the language of *Nayikabheda* literature the sculpture depicts *Manini Nayika*.

24. PREPARING FOR THE DANCE. PARSVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The dance in ancient India required careful training and preparation. The *Bharata Natyasastra*, the most important text on dancing, gives directions on the preparation to be made before the actual commencement of the performance. Here the danseuse, after putting on her ornaments, the breast-band, and a slick patterned *sari*, is tying the tinklers (*ghunghrus*) to her raised right foot. An attendant in the foreground holds up an anklet of tinklers for her mistress's use.

25. AN INTIMATE KISS. KANDARIYA MAHADEVA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The couple hold each other in a close sexual embrace. Their mouths are in close proximity and the tenseness of their faces shows the union as an act of dedication.

26. THE FOND EMBRACE. VISVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The female partner, partly disrobed, is clinging fast to her lover who has crooked one of his legs to support her. The woman attendant on the right, apparently not used to such scenes, is hiding her face.

27. THE EMBRACE. (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The male figure has caught the female from behind. She is touching her lover's head and he in his turn is fondling her breasts. Their closed eyes and tense faces show the intensity of love-desire.

28. AMOROUS COUPLE. (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The male partner stands in a slanting position with a smile playing on his lips. The female is astride him from the front, the deep curvature of her posterior catching the rhythm of the act.

29. AN ACROBATIC SEXUAL POSTURE. KANDARIYA MAHADEVA TEMPLE. (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The man stands on his head with his interlocked legs supporting his squatting female partner. Female attendants on either side participate in the act by supporting the couple.

30. BACCHANALIAN SCENE. (MATHURA). KUSHANA, 2ND CENTURY.

A courtesan in the last stages of drunkenness is kneeling on the ground in almost complete nudity. She is being supported by her lover on the left and a girl cup-bearer on the right. The old bawd on the same side stands in disgust. The scene represents a *goshthi*.

31. MITHUNA FIGURES. (DEOGARH, U.P.) EARLY 6TH CENTURY.

The *mithuna* figures in the Gupta sculpture lose their earlier lascivious character and gain a new sobriety in which the emphasis is on spiritual love. In the panels depicted in the plate the couple are either conversing intimately or the *nayika* is showing her feigned resentment towards her lover—two outstanding motifs in the poetry of the Gupta period.

32. KING WITH HIS RANIS. (AJANTA, CAVE 19). 6TH CENTURY.

Within a lotus roundel is shown a bed on which is seated the king with queens on either side whom he is caressing.

33. THE DANCE OF SHIVA. (ELLORA, CAVE 14). 8TH CENTURY.

This relief represents the Tandava dance of Shiva, 'under whose violent thumping of feet the mountains crumbled and the entire world including the seas were agitated'. The eight-handed Shiva holding various symbols is dancing with great fervour on a bare rock. There are drummers and a piper on the left and Parvati with Kartikeya and Ganesa on the right. The gods in the sky are witnessing the dance.

34. SHIVA'S MARRIAGE. DHUMAR LENA (ELLORA). 8TH CENTURY.

In Shaivite mythology the marriage of Shiva with Uma signifies the union of male and female principles to ensure the continuity of creation. In the sculptural representations, however, the incident gains in tenderness as it represents the Hindu marriage which, in the presence of the gods, unites two souls till death parts them. Shiva's marriage is here represented on a grand scale. In the centre stands Shiva holding the right hand of Parvati. Brahma is himself acting as chief priest. To the left stand the parents of Parvati. A congregation of gods and goddesses floating in the sky is witnessing the solemnisation of the marriage.

35. SEVEN PAGODAS. SHORE TEMPLE (MAMALLAPURAM). 7TH CENTURY.

The waves of the ancient Mahodadhi (Bay of Bengal) wash the base of phallic-tipped lamp-post to warn the unwary navigators against the dangers of the sea.

36. LINGODBHAVA MURTI. TRIMURTI SHRINE (MAMALLAPURAM). PALLAVA, 7TH CENTURY.

In the foreground is the *lingam* from which emanates the visual form of the four-handed Shiva, symbolising the creative energy of the male.

37. A CELESTIAL COUPLE. TREE BRACKET OF A CAPITAL (BADAMI, CAVE III). A.D. 578.

The bejewelled couple stands under a stylised tree. The male, in resplendent finery, embraces his beloved, who shows a coy grace. The lover holds her hand, but she has averted her face in shyness, though a gentle smile reveals her consent to his advances.

38. CELESTIAL COUPLE. TREE BRACKET OF A CAPITAL (BADAMI, CAVE III). A.D. 578.

The couple standing under a tree betray an attenuated modelling and smooth grace closely akin to the Pallava tradition. While both the male and female are profusely ornamented, their garments are reduced to the minimum. The male holds a garland-like object touched by his partner. An attendant stands in the foreground.

39. CELESTIAL COUPLE. TREE BRACKET OF A CAPITAL (BADAMI, CAVE III). A.D. 578.

The couple stand under a mango tree, which symbolises love and spring in Indian poetry. The male stands rigidly, holding the extended left leg of his beloved in his right hand while her left hand touches his head-dress.

40. LOVE SCENE. (HUCHCHIPANA MATH, MYSORE). 8TH CENTURY.

The male standing to the right wears, besides jewellery, a sacred thread. His left hand holds the plaited braid of his beloved's hair and his right hand supports her raised leg. She in turn is gripping his head with both hands. An attendant is in the foreground.

41. MITHUNA COUPLE. (HUCHCHIPANA MATH, MYSORE). 8TH CENTURY.

The couple, bejewelled and wearing only loin-cloths, stand in a decorous mood, gently caressing each other. Their heavy faces are lit with broad smiles.

42. MITHUNA FIGURES. A PART OF THE DOOR FRAME (DEOGARH, U.P.) EARLY 6TH CENTURY.

In the top, bottom and middle panels frolicsome dwarfs are depicted. In the second panel the *nayika* in a dejected mood is being flattered by her lover. In the fourth panel the couple is shown in lively conversation.

43. GENERAL VIEW. LINGARAJA TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 1000.

The Lingaraja or Great Temple occupies the centre of a quadrangular enclosure, 520 feet by 405 feet. The most impressive feature is the great tower of the Sri Mandir. The outer walls are covered with a profusion of figure compositions of an absorbing nature, *mithuna* figures being greatly in evidence.

44. RELIGIOUS ORGY. PERHAPS FROM THE MUKTESVARA TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 950.

The scene represents the ritualistic orgy of the Kaula-Kapalikas. Starting from the left a Kapalika embracing the Kapalavanita; sexual congress; Kapalika tilting the chin of a woman; coitus invertus. The entire composition represents *Bhairavichakra* or unbridled sexual orgy, an act of faith with the Kapalikas.

45. SHIVA-PARVATI. PARASHURAMESHWAR TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 750.

Shiva is seated in *maharajalilasana* with a lotus of dalliance in his right hand, holding Parvati tightly in embrace. His erect phallus indicates his *Lakulisa* form. The bull and the lion, respective vehicles of Shiva and Parvati, are in the foreground; a shy female attendant is to the right.

46. MITHUNA. RAJA RANI TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 1150.

The couple is associated with a tree. The lover with a meaningful smile is untying the knot of the *sari* of his beloved who is responding to his movements in perfect accord. Untying the *sari* knot of the beloved is a common motif in Sanskrit poetry.

47. DISCREET LOVE. LINGARAJA TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 1000.

The lover, wearing elaborate ornaments, with a gentle smile on his face has drawn his beloved towards him. Her shy response is indicated by a smile revealing confidence in her lover. The theme may represent a motif in *Nayikabheda* in which the heroine receives her husband returning after a long sojourn in a distant land.

48. AMOROUS COUPLE. RAJA RANI TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 1150.

The female partner has stepped forward to meet her lover, whose left hand is round her shoulders while with his right hand he unties her sari knot. She is coyly dissuading him. The soft modelling and graceful smiles of the figures stand in contrast to the grim emotional intensity of most Khajuraho *mithunas*.

49. AMOROUS COUPLE. RAJA RANI TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 1150.

This seems to be a representation of *Mugdha Nayika*. The hero clad in a simple *dhoti* is embracing his beloved who is offering a feeble resistance. Note their meaningful smiles and the graceful plasticity of the sculpture.

50. SEXUAL UNION. RAJA RANI TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). C. A.D. 1150.

The bearded male is kissing his female partner whom he has stepped forward to embrace. Note the graceful modelling of the figures, almost lyrical in its undulations.

51. MITHUNA. BRAHMESHWAR TEMPLE (BHUBANESHWAR). 10TH CENTURY.

The woman wearing the minimum of dress and ornaments stands smiling and embracing her male partner. Not a shred of clothing or ornament decorate his person. Possibly he is a Kaula teacher whose cult encouraged sexual union as one of the means of emancipation.

52. AMOROUS COUPLE. (PURI). 17TH CENTURY (INDIAN MUSEUM, CALCUTTA).

The couple fondling each other stand under a tree, the right hand of the woman holding a branch. The smiling faces and wide open eyes of the couple add charm to the composition. The *tilak* on the forehead and the shaved pate of the male indicate that he is a votary of Jagannatha enjoying the company of one of the temple dancing-girls.

53. GENERAL VIEW OF THE JAGAMOHANA. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The Sun (Surya) Temple of Konarak, known as the Black Pagoda to the European navigators of the 17th century, is a mightily conceived example of Orissan temple architecture almost in its last phase. A distinguishing feature of the sculptured reliefs of Konarak is their frank eroticism in which the artists do not hesitate to represent even erotic postures (*bandhas*) impossible to execute in life.

54. THE CHARIOT WHEEL. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The mighty temple at Konarak was conceived in the form of the Chariot of the Sun. The hub, the spokes and the rim of each wheel are richly carved with animal and floral designs and the figures of Hindu gods and goddesses.

55. LOVE-MAKING. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The male, affecting rich ornaments and a bun-shaped hair style, is holding his female partner in a close embrace. Note the tautness in modelling expressive of the force of sexual desire. With his left hand the man tilts the face of his partner while she lovingly enfolds him.

56. MITHUNA PAIR. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The pair is shown standing under a tree on a lotus pedestal. The male, who sports a moustache and a conical cap fringed with beads, is kissing his female partner, who clings round his neck. Her feet are being supported on his palms.

57. EROTIC SCENE. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The male partner stands against a stylised tree with his left leg bent inward. He has an angular face. His buxom female partner grasps his neck with both hands and lifts her right leg up to his waist.

58. MITHUNA COUPLE. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The male figure stands to the right facing his partner. Note the conical cap fringed with beads and *patra-kundala*. His heavy face is lit up with a smile and his left hand is playing with the breasts of his partner, whose right hand is toying with his genitals.

59. EROTIC SCENES. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

The four erotic reliefs on the base mouldings represent different stages in love-making. Significantly, all four *mithunas* are associated with trees, reminiscent of the ancient Woman and Tree motif which had a close connection with fertility cults. From the artistic viewpoint, the reliefs lack the dynamic sex-urge, and their lack of movement shows that they were intended mainly to illustrate the sexual postures enjoined by mediaeval works on the erotic art.

60. CLOSE-UP OF A FEMALE MUSICIAN. SURYA TEMPLE (KONARAK, ORISSA). 13TH CENTURY.

In the general estimation of art historians, the fame of Konarak rests mainly on its erotic sculptures. To accept this view implicitly however would be doing an injustice to the builders of Konarak who were very much alive to the physical beauty of the human figure. The female musicians represented at Konarak combine all the physical graces enjoined by Sanskrit literature yet hardly evoke carnal desire.

61. JAIN TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO).

The Shikhara and the upper part of the façade are here shown. The latter is covered with sculptural panels, some depicting *mithuna* figures.

62. DETAILS OF SCULPTURES ON NORTH FACADE. KANDARIYA MAHADEVA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY A.D.

The façade is literally covered with the figures of gods and goddesses, women at toilet, and erotic scenes depicting women astride their male partners supported by male and female attendants.

63. DETAILS OF SCULPTURES ON THE SOUTH FACADE. KANDARIYA MAHADEVA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The south façade of the temple is covered with the figures of gods and goddesses, women at toilet and erotic scenes—a man fondling a woman helped by an attendant; a woman astride her male partner; and a man standing on his head with a woman astride him supported by two women.

64. EROTIC SCENE. VISVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

An acrobatic sexual posture in which three women and a man are participating. A large number of such postures have been described in the Kama Sutra and similar texts, but it is doubtful whether they were ever practised.

65. RITUALISTIC ORGY. MATANGESWARA-LAKSHMANA TEMPLE TERRACE (KHAJURAHO). 10TH CENTURY.

In the liturgy of the Kaula-Kapalikas wine and women were supposed to act as a means of liberation, and this resulted in grossest kind of sexual excesses in the name of religion and yoga. The scene represents *Bhairavichakra* in which all decencies are thrown to the wind. The unadorned persons of the male participants, their hairdressing and beards and the ritualistic objects they carry leave little doubt of their identification. The scenes represented are, from left to right; exotic love-play; *amrachushaka* or *fellatio*; the 'mare-and-horse' posture and bottom *kakali* posture.

66. MITHUNA FIGURE. DEVI JAGADAMBA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The couple is engaged in a very close embrace with their animated faces in close proximity. In order to emphasize their firm and lithesome limbs, the clothes and ornaments have been reduced to a minimum by the sculptor.

67. MITHUNA. DEVI JAGADAMBA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

In a close sexual embrace the female partner grips the top knot of her lover, the act being reciprocated by him. The rhythmic flow of their bodies and the movement of the hands are emphasized, while the minimum of clothing and ornaments shows the firm flesh of their bodies.

68. MITHUNA. (KHAJURAHO). 12TH CENTURY.

The dresses and ornaments of the couple except for elaborate head-crowns are reduced to the minimum, the main emphasis being on the preliminaries of love-making. The proximity of their faces, their bodies in delicate embrace, the female partner in the act of disrobing her lover, are expressive of a deep and understanding love.

69. DANCERS. LAKSHMANA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 10TH CENTURY.

The ecstatic dance in which men and women equally took part was a distinguishing feature of the Kaula ritual. The male partner, his face calm and ecstatic and his legs crossed, is playing castanets while his smiling female partner is playing the cymbals.

70. MITHUNA. (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The intricate hair-dresses and details of simple costumes and ornaments are effectively represented. The outstanding point of the sculpture is the tension of passion resulting in taut muscles, firmly closed lips and half-closed rolling eyes.

71. DANCE POSE. PARSVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

A moment of gay abandon in the dance is caught and rendered with subtility. The right hand delicately poised over the head, the left hand holding the necklace, the crossed legs, the flowing *dupatta*, and, above all, the face absorbed in the rhythmic movement of the dance, express the technical achievements of the sculptor.

72. LOVERS. (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The effect of frank sensuality of the couple is toned down by the heaviness of modelling and rather awkward hand postures.

73. AN AMOROUS COUPLE. VISHVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

The ancient Indian erotic texts advise love-play to be accompanied by music as depicted here in the form of the flautist.

74. STANDING LOVERS. PARSVANATHA TEMPLE (KHAJURAHO). 11TH CENTURY.

A mild form of *mithuna*, but the expression on the faces of the couples speaks eloquently of growing love.

75. DALLIANCE. KEDARESVARA TEMPLE (HALEBID). 13TH CENTURY.

Within a pillared and fringed room furnished with a bed, the couple is shown in the act of love-making. Similar scenes are found in the contemporary Orissan temple sculpture.

76. LOVE-SCENES. PRASANNA CHANNA KESAVA TEMPLE (SOMNATHPURA, MYSORE). HOYSALA, A.D. 1270.

These scenes appear as a part of a frieze surrounding the outer base of the temple. On the left is a bed provided with mattress and a pillow on which the male is making love in a reclining posture with his partner. On the right the female is clinging to her male partner. Her right arm is round her lover's neck while the left hand is pulling his hair-lock.

77. LOVE-MAKING. PRASANNA CHANNA KESAVA TEMPLE (SOMNATHPURA, MYSORE). HOYSALA, A.D. 1270.

This love-scene occurs on a frieze round the base of the temple. On the left a couple stand quite decorously; on the right is depicted a chamber provided with decorative hangings and a bed. The couple are engaged in love-making in a way described in the Kama Sutra as the *Kakali* posture.

78. SHIVA-PARVATI. KALYANA MANDAPAM (VELLORE). VIJAYANAGAR STYLE. 16TH CENTURY.

The four-handed standing Shiva is profusely ornamented. His natural right hand cups the chin of Parvati and his left hand goes around her shoulders. She stands in a rigid posture reminiscent of contemporary bronzes.

79. MITHUNA. KALYANA MANDAPAM (VELLORE). VIJAYANAGAR STYLE. 16TH CENTURY.

The male, wearing a tall head-dress and an embroidered garment, has raised his right hand while his left passes round his female partner, who clings closely to him. The composition shows that even in the latter days of Indian classical sculpture, a lyrical feeling, reminiscent of earlier works, persisted.

80. EROTIC SCENE. VARADARAJA PERUMAL TEMPLE (KANCHIPURAM). 16TH CENTURY.

In the Vedanta-desika shrine appears on a pillar an almost life-size bas-relief of Parvati holding a parrot and worshipped by three Saivite devotees with erect organs. On a pedestal a Pasupata devotee blowing a horn, an important musical instrument in Saivite rites, enjoys his acrobatic partner.

81. COITUS INVERTUS. RANGANATHASWAMI TEMPLE (SRIRANGAM). 17TH CENTURY.

This temple is one of the holiest shrines of Vishnu in India. The appearance of erotic scenes on the drum of one of the pillars in the celebrated Horse Court proves that erotic sculptures were not confined to Saivite temples only. To the left is shown a woman performing acrobatics with a couple below engaged in love-making; on the right, within an arched room, another couple is engaged in coitus invertus.

82. AMOROUS COUPLE. VARADARAJA PERUMAL TEMPLE (KANCHIPURAM). 16TH CENTURY.

This scene occurs in the Kalyana Mandapam of the temple. The male, his head quite out of proportion to his body, affects an elaborate hair style and sports a Vaishnavite *tilaka* on his forehead. His hands are caressing his female partner, who stands on her toes to meet the embrace of her lover, whose cheeks she holds with her hands.

- 83, 84. EROTIC SCENES ON THE BASES OF ROOF STRUTS. SHIVA TEMPLE (KATHMANDU). 19TH CENTURY.

Erotic scenes, both in wood and metal, are common in Brahmanic and Mantrayana Buddhist sculptures in Nepal. Such erotica, however, are not of great artistic merit, though they show the continuity of an ancient tradition. The postures represented here are coitus (left) and 'horse and mare' motif (right).

- 85, 86. EROTICA ON THE BASES OF ROOF STRUTS. SHIVA TEMPLE (KATHMANDU). 19TH CENTURY.

The left-hand pair imitate a horse and a mare, while in the right-hand scene a lusty potter with a child in his head-slung basket, dallies with a woman who still has an infant at her breast.

- 87, 88. EROTICA ON THE BASES OF ROOF STRUTS. SHIVA TEMPLE (KATHMANDU). 19TH CENTURY.

The scene on the left represents lesbian love and the one on the right coitus invertus.

- 89, 90. EROTICA ON THE BASES OF ROOF STRUTS. SHIVA TEMPLE (KATHMANDU). 19TH CENTURY.

The scene on the left depicts sexual aberration and that on the right represents an amorous couple at play.

- 91, 92. EROTICA ON THE BASES OF ROOF STRUTS. SHIVA TEMPLE (KATHMANDU). 19TH CENTURY.

A bedroom scene, with an attendant, appears on the left while that on the right represents coitus invertus.

- 93, 94. EROTICA ON THE BASES OF ROOF STRUTS. SHIVA TEMPLE (KATHMANDU).

On the left coitus invertus; on the right, a 'mare-and-horse' posture sanctioned in *ars amoris*.

95. PUBLIC SHELTER. CHITLONG (CENTRAL NEPAL). 18TH CENTURY. (?)

Miniature carvings depicting *mithunas* can be seen above the wooden pillars.

96. BARRACKS. DHANKUTA (EASTERN NEPAL). 19TH CENTURY. (?)

A terra-cotta *mithuna* is built into the brick walls enclosing this ramshackle barracks outside a Nepalese provincial capital.

GLOSSARY

Adi-Buddha:	The primal Buddha, identical with the Supreme Being of Hinduism.
Amrachushaka:	A sexual posture known to the West as <i>fellatio</i> .
Aphrodite:	Greek Goddess of Love and Beauty, counterpart of the Roman Venus.
Apsaras:	A heavenly nymph, a courtesan of Indra's heaven.
Ardhanari:	The androgynous, or half-female, form of Shiva, personifying the bi-sexual conception of God.
Arghya:	Yoni (q.v.).
Atman:	The soul, or self.
Attis:	The lover of Agdistis, Phrygian Mother of the Gods. Sometimes identified with Adonis, Pan and Sabazius.
Aum:	The mystic mono-syllable symbolising the Oneness of God.
Bacchanale:	Festival of Bacchus, the Roman God of Wine.
Bandha:	A posture of the body, sometimes of an erotic nature.
Bhagavadgita:	The Song Celestial. A poem of 700 verses found in the Mahabharata containing the cream of Hindu philosophy.
Bhairava:	The fearsome aspect of Shiva, also known as Khandehrao.
Bhairavichakra:	A sexual orgy in Sakti-worship.
Bhakti:	The cult of devotion to a deity.
Bharata Nartya-sastra:	The most important text on Indian dancing.
Brahma:	The Creator, the first manifestation of the Absolute in Hindu philosophy. First person of the Hindu trinity.
Chamavira:	The harness of crossed scarves worn by fertility goddesses.
Chauri:	Fly-whisk symbol of royalty.
Caryantes:	The male companions of Cybele (q.v.).
Cybele:	Great Mother of the Gods of the Greeks.
Devas:	The thirty-three Vedic deities.
Durga:	Shiva's consort in mother-goddess form.
Galli:	The priestess of Cybele (q.v.).
Gopuram:	Monumental gateway of an Indian temple.
Goshti:	The Indian equivalent of a Bacchanale (q.v.), a drunken revel.
Hevajra:	The Yi-Dam Samvara (q.v.).
Isis:	Sister-wife of the ancient Egyptian god Osiris, and mother of Horus.
Jagannatha:	A form of Vishnu (q.v.), as Lord of the Universe.
Kakali:	A sexual posture, a form of reciprocal <i>fellatio</i> .
Kali:	'The Black', a terrible form of Shiva's consort.
Kama:	Hindu God of Love and the pursuit of pleasure.
Kama Sutra:	The earliest and most authoritative work on the art of love, written by Vatsyayana, probably in the Gupta era.
Kapalavanita:	A Tantric 'consort'.
Kapalikas:	An extreme Tantric cult.

Karma:	The idea of retribution in the life cycle.
Kaulas:	A Tantric cult.
Krishna:	A reincarnation of Vishnu.
Kundi:	The <i>lingam</i> and <i>yoni</i> represented together.
Lakshmi:	The consort of Vishnu, Goddess of Fortune, Beauty and Happiness.
Lakulisa:	Shiva in a rampant aspect.
Lalrasana:	A Yogic posture.
Larabandha:	An erotic posture simulating the embrace of a creeper and a tree.
Lesbianism:	Female homosexuality.
Lingam:	The phallic emblem of Shiva.
Lila:	The supernatural world.
Maharajalilasana:	A Yogic posture.
Makara:	A crocodile-shaped creature, emblem of water and fertility. Also used to describe the five elements of Panchatatva (q.v.).
Manini Nayika:	A "courting" phase of love-making.
Mantrayana:	Incantational symbolism.
Mithuna:	Sexual union. An erotically inclined couple.
Moksha:	Union with the divine. Release from worldly existence.
Mugdha Nayika:	A flirtatious pose.
Mysteries:	Rites secret from all save the initiated.
Nagraja:	King of the serpents or water-spirits.
Nandi:	Shiva's bull charger and chief of the <i>ganas</i> (demi-gods).
Nayika:	An emotional state.
Nayikabhedha:	Romantic emotion.
Omophagia:	The eating of raw flesh.
Oratorians:	A Christian religious order consisting of a number of independent houses first organised in 1575 by a Florentine priest, Philip Neri.
Panchatatva:	The five <i>makaras</i> , or elements of fundamental principles: <i>Madya</i> (liquor), <i>Manas</i> (meat), <i>Matsya</i> (fish), <i>Mudra</i> (corn), <i>Mithuna</i> (intercourse).
Parvati:	The consort of Shiva, daughter of the Himalayas.
Pamputas:	The sect of the uninitiated.
Phallus:	The male organ of generation.
Priapus:	A Greek god of fertility.
Puranas:	The 18 sacred books of Hindu mythology and epic, including the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.
Purusa:	The male cosmic principle.
Rudra-Shiva:	The god of the Vedas from whom Shiva was derived.
Sabazius:	A Phrygian or Thracian deity frequently identified with Dionysus and sometimes Zeus.
Saktas:	Those Hindus who consider the godhead to be essentially feminine.
Sakti:	The consort or female energy of a deity. The active power of a god as his feminine complement. The creative force in its female aspect.
Shiva:	The Destroyer and Reproducer, third person of the Hindu trinity.
Shivalinga:	Shiva in his phallic form, the <i>lingam</i> (q.v.).
Surya:	The sun god of the Vedic pantheon.

Tandava:	Shiva's dance in the cemeteries and burning-grounds, symbolic of his cosmic function of creation and destruction.
Tantra:	The 22 volumes of mystic treatises of the Tantra system, which, with its emphasis on sakti (q.v.) worship first influenced Buddhism in N. India towards the end of the 6th Century A.D., later also influencing Hinduism.
Trimurti:	The triad or trinity of Hinduism: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, symbolised by a three-faced figure.
Uma:	A name of the consort of Shiva in her mild form.
Upanishads:	The mystical doctrines attached to the Vedas (q.v.).
Vedas:	The four books containing the sacred knowledge for the performance of Brahmanic priestly ritual. The most famous is the Rig Veda, composed in the 1st Millennium B.C.
Vimana:	Towered sanctuary of a temple containing the cell in which the deity is enshrined.
Vishnu:	The Preserver, and Second Person of the Hindu Trinity.
Yaksha:	One of a class of supernatural beings perhaps originally associated only with fertility cults and later assimilated into the orthodox religions.
Yakshi:	A female Yaksha (q.v.).
Yantra:	A mystic diagram of the Sakti cult sometimes worn in the form of a charm, or drawn, painted or carved in association with mystic letters.
Vi-Dam Samvara:	The twelve-armed, four-headed Nepalese manifestation of the oneness of the Godhead.
Vi-Dam Sang-Dul:	The Tibetan equivalent of the Vi-Dam Samvara (q.v.).
Yoga:	Communion with the Universal Spirit by the practice of ecstatic meditation. Introduced into Hinduism by Patanjali in the 2nd Century A.C.
Yoni:	The female sexual organ.

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